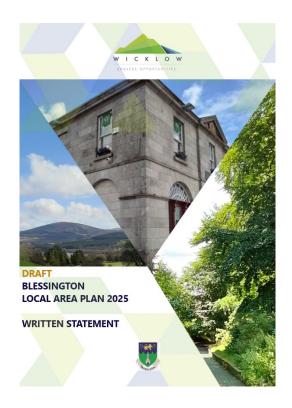


# Comhairle Contae Chill Mhantáin Wicklow County Council



Proposed Alterations to the Proposed Variation No. 3 to the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022 – 2028

(related to draft Blessington Local Area Plan 2025)

2<sup>nd</sup> Chief Executive's Report to the members of Wicklow County Council under Section 13 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)



14<sup>th</sup> May 2025

#### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

# 1.1 Proposed Variation No. 3 to the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028

In accordance with Section 13(2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), Wicklow County Council is proposing to vary the County Development Plan 2022-2028.

Reason for the Proposed Variation:

- Amendments to Chapters 1, 3 and 17 to the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 to ensure consistency between the draft and final Blessington Local Area Plan with the County Development Plan 2022 2028;
- Amendments to Volume 2 of the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 to integrate the land use zoning map and key development objectives from the Blessington Local Area Plan, which is being prepared separately but alongside the Proposed Variation, into the County Development Plan 2022 2028.

# 1.2 Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)

In accordance with Section 13 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), the members of the planning authority considered the Proposed Variation published on 30 October 2024 and the 1st Chief Executive's Report issued on 31 January 2025.

By resolution at the Council meeting on the 03 March 2025, the members of the planning authority decided to make alterations to the Proposed Variation.

As said alterations constituted 'material' alterations to the Proposed Variation, the planning authority was required to publish notice of the Proposed Material Alterations (PMAs) and any determination that required the carrying out of a Strategic Environmental Assessment or Appropriate Assessment for public consultation.

The Proposed Material Alterations (PMAs) and associated determinations went on public display for a period of not less than 4 weeks on **24 March 2025** with submissions invited until **23 April 2025**.

All valid submissions shall be taken into account before the variation of the development plan is made.

Formally, making a variation is done by resolution of the Council.

In making a variation to a development plan, the members are restricted to considering the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, the statutory obligations of a local authority and any relevant policies or objectives of the Government or any Minister of the Government.

Where a planning authority makes a variation to a development plan, it shall publish a notice of the making of the variation in at least one newspaper circulating in its area. A variation made to a development plan shall have effect from the day that the variation is made.

It should be noted that the PMAs to the Proposed Variation are all related to the Proposed Material Amendments to the draft Blessington Local Area Plan 2025-2031. For completeness, it is recommended that interested parties should consider both processes in tandem, including the Proposed Material Amendments to the Draft LAP and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chief Executives Report on the Proposed Material Amendments to the Draft LAP, published concurrently with this report.

# 1.3 Proposed Material Alterations (PMAs) - Consultation Process

The PMAs to the Proposed Variation were placed on display, alongside the Proposed Material Amendments to the Draft Blessington Local Area Plan (LAP) 2025, during the period of 24 March 2025 to 23 April 2025 (4 weeks). The aim of the consultation process was to enable the public and interested parties to give their observations on the PMAs to the Proposed Variation. The LAP and Variation process are two separate processes with this CE report focusing on the variation process and a separate CE report has been prepared with respect to the submissions on the Proposed Material Amendments to the Draft Local Area Plan.

A consultation portal was provided that allowed the submitter to identify whether their submission related to the PMAs to the Proposed Variation or the Proposed Material Amendments to the draft LAP.

A number of submissions received which selected or were headed 'Proposed Material Alterations to Proposed Variation No. 3' contained content related to both the PMAs to the Proposed Variation and the Proposed Material Amendments to the draft LAP.

A number of submissions received which selected or were headed '*Proposed Material Alterations to Proposed Variation No. 3*' contained <u>only content</u> related Proposed Material Amendments to the draft LAP and therefore were unintentionally 'mislabelled'.

A number of submissions received which selected or were headed '*Proposed Material Alterations to Proposed Variation No. 3'* contained <u>no content</u> related to either the PMAs to the Proposed Variation or the Proposed Material Amendments to the draft LAP.

Only issues raised that relate to the content of the PMAs to the Proposed Variation can be considered at this stage of making the Variation and will appear and be addressed in this report.

Any other matters raised are considered 'invalid' with respect to the Proposed Variation process, but where the content relates to the Proposed Material Amendments to the draft LAP, the submission and the issues raised therein are addressed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chief Executives Report on the Proposed Material Amendments to the Draft LAP.

While a total of **8 No.** submissions selected or were headed '*Proposed Material Alterations to Proposed Variation No. 3'*, only **6 No.** submissions contained any content related to the Proposed Material Alterations to the Proposed Variation.

Submissions on the Proposed Material Alterations to the Proposed Variation are available for inspection on Wicklow Council's website <a href="here">here</a>.

#### **Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment**

The Proposed Material Alterations were subject to Screening for SEA, which allowed a determination to be made that: the Alterations would not be likely to result in significant environmental effects; and that, consequently, full SEA was not required to be undertaken on the Alterations.

The Proposed Material Alterations were also subject to Screening for AA, which allowed a determination to be made that: the Alterations would not be likely to result in any significant effect on any European site; and that, consequently, Stage 2 AA was not required to be undertaken on the Alterations.

# 1.4 List of submissions to the Proposed Material Alterations to the Proposed Variation

Portal ID	Name	
DBLESSLAP-102407	Environmental Protection Agency	
DBLESSLAP-122308	Transport Infrastructure Ireland	
DBLESSLAP-161804	Department of Education	
DBLESSLAP-121859	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	
DBLESSLAP-140351	Office of Public Works	
DBLESSLAP-141126	Office of the Planning Regulator	

List of submissions identified or headed '*Proposed Material Alterations to Proposed Variation No. 2*' that contained no content in relation to the PMAs to Proposed Variation No. 3

Portal ID	Name
DBLESSLAP-154344	Lorraine McNamara
DBLESSLAP-150902	Meath County Council

#### 1.5 Consideration of Submissions

Submissions made have been summarised and assessed in **Part 2** of this report, under the heading of each of the PMAs to the Proposed Variation.

No specific 'further modifications' to any of the Proposed Material Alterations to the Proposed Variation are recommended by the Chief Executive on foot of any submission.

The CE is recommending to proceed to make the Proposed Variation in accordance with all of the Proposed Material Alterations <u>subject to any amendments / modifications that arises on foot of the Blessington LAP</u> 2025 adoption process.

This report is herewith submitted to the Council Members for their consideration.

The consideration of this report and the making of the Variation No. 3 is a matter that will be on the agenda for consideration at the County Council meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> June 2025.

# **1.6 Summary of Proposed Material Alterations**

The table below provides a summary of the published Proposed Material Alterations and details whether any submission were made in relation to each. Those marked 'CE' were recommended by the Chief Executive in her 1<sup>st</sup> Report and were approved by the Elected Members (EM).

No.	CE	Brief description	Valid Submissions	CE recommendation
1	EM	Alter Volume 2, Part 5.0.2 'Zoning and Land Use Objectives' to include the SLC 'Small Local Centre' zoning objective	Transport Infrastructure Ireland Office of Public Works	Do <u><b>not</b></u> proceed.
2	CE/EM	Alter Map 1 Land use Zoning for the Blessington LAP	Transport Infrastructure Ireland Department of Education Office of Public Works	The CE's recommendation for each proposed zoning change is set out in the CE's Report to the Proposed Material Amendments to the LAP
3	CE	Alter Map 4 Indicative Flood Zones Maps for the Blessington LAP	Transport Infrastructure Ireland Department of Education Office of Public Works	Proceed Subject to any amendments / modifications from LAP adoption process.
4	CE	Alter Transport Strategy Maps for the Blessington LAP	Transport Infrastructure Ireland Department of Education Office of Public Works	Proceed Subject to any amendments / modifications from LAP adoption process.
		SEA / AA	EPA	

#### 2. PROPOSED MATERIAL ALTERATIONS TO PROPOSED VARIATION NO. 3

To follow is a list of the Proposed Material Alterations to Proposed Variation No. 3 to the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028

#### PROPOSED MATERIAL ALTERATION NO. 1

Alter Volume 2, Part 5.0.2 'Zoning and Land Use Objectives' to include the following:

Zoning	Objective	Description
	To provide for small scale local services	To facilitate the development of small scale local shop / retail services and other local scale employment and community service uses that meet only the retail or service needs of residents in the immediate catchment and are not of such a scale or type that would detract or draw trade from the town centre.

# **Proposed Material Alteration No. 1**

**No Submissions** 

#### **Opinion of Chief Executive**

This Proposed Material Amendments to the Proposed Variation is related to a proposed change in the zoning of lands from 'E – Employment' to 'SLC – Small Local Centre' (subject to Proposed Material Amendments No. 2 to follow).

The CE does not support the proposed amendment for the reasons already set out in the concurrent 1<sup>st</sup> CE Report to the **Draft Blessington Local Area Plan 2025**, namely:

'In relation to the lands zoned E 'Employment', the subject lands are located outside the Blessington Core Retail Area as set out in the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 and outside of lands zoned TC 'Town Centre' in the Draft LAP. The Draft Blessington LAP 2025 Written Statement states the following: 'Blessington is fortunate in that retail uses are currently concentrated within Blessington Town Centre, with no large out-of-centre retail activity. The current, and envisioned, spatial extent of Blessington does not indicate that such out-of-centre or 'neighbourhood centre' retail areas are currently required or desirable.' Therefore, rezoning the subject lands to allow for retail uses would undermine objective BLESS4, which states the following:

To direct retail development into the Core Retail Area as a first priority, as set out in the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 (or any update thereof), in line with its position in the County Retail Hierarchy & Strategy. This will be accomplished as follows:

- There will be no quantitative restriction on the development of retail floorspace within the Blessington Core Retail Area.
- All developments for additional retail floorspace, which are both outside the Core Retail Area and within Blessington Town Centre (as zoned for such purposes), will be required to be accompanied by a Retail Impact Assessment in line with 'Guidelines for Planning Authorities – Retail Planning'

2012 and any updated or relevant guidelines.

The development of retail floorspace outside of Blessington Town Centre (as zoned for such purposes) will not be facilitated unless absolutely necessary.'

Note that childcare uses, as raised in the submission, may be permissible under the E 'Employment' zoning.

Furthermore, attention is drawn to objective BLESS14, which facilitates and supports the incremental reconfiguration of Blessington Business Park/Oak Drive toward a secondary 'people'-based employment area, which would allow for the development of higher density employment, as raised in the submission.'

It is noted that the above CE opinion was in response to a submission request for a MU 'Mixed Use' zoning, as opposed to the SLC 'Small Local Centre' as per this proposed amendment. However, the SLC 'Small Local Centre' zoning facilitates the development of retail uses. On this basis, the above response remains valid.

# **Recommendation of Chief Executive**

To **not proceed** to make Proposed Material Alteration No. 1

# **PROPOSED MATERIAL ALTERATION NO. 2**

Alter Map 1 Land use Zoning for the Blessington LAP

[This Proposed Material Alteration to the Proposed Variation relates to the land use zoning changes proposed to the Draft LAP via:

- Proposed Material Amendment 19 to the Draft LAP
- Proposed Material Amendment 21 to the Draft LAP
- Proposed Material Amendment 22 to the Draft LAP
- Proposed Material Amendment 23 to the Draft LAP
- Proposed Material Amendment 24 to the Draft LAP
- Proposed Material Amendment 25 to the Draft LAP
- Proposed Material Amendment 26 to the Draft LAP
- Proposed Material Amendment 27 to the Draft LAP
- Proposed Material Amendment 28 to the Draft LAP
- Proposed Material Amendment 29 to the Draft LAP
- Proposed Material Amendment 30 to the Draft LAP]

# **Proposed Material Alteration No. 2**

#### **Submissions**

#### 2. Transport Infrastructure Ireland

TII's observations on the proposed Material Alterations to proposed Variation no. 3 are contained within the enclosed TII submission concurrently made in respect of the proposed amendment to the Draft Blessington Local Area Plan (LAP) 2025 (TII ref. TII25-130890).

#### 3. Department of Education

The Department notes that the material alterations propose to adjust the Land Use Zoning map, the Flood Zone maps and the Transport Strategy maps for the draft Blessington LAP.

#### 5. Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage

#### **Nature Conservation**

The following observations are made by the Department in its role as the authority with overarching responsibility for nature conservation and the nature Directives (i.e. the EU Birds and Habitats Directives) and as an environmental authority under SEA legislation. The observations are not exhaustive and are offered to assist Wicklow County Council in meeting its obligations in relation to nature conservation, European sites, biodiversity and environmental protection in the preparation of the Proposed Material Alterations to Proposed Variation No. 3 to the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028.

# Proposed Material Amendment No. 25 - OP4

The Department is concerned about the Proposed Material Amendment from 'OS2 – Natural Space' to 'E – Employment', and potential impacts on the adjacent Poulaphouca Reservoir SPA. The Poulaphouca Reservoir SPA is designated for two Special Conservation Interest (SCI) bird species, greylag goose (Anser anser), and lesser black-backed gull (Larus fuscus). The PMA No.25 is approximately 530m from the SPA boundary. The SPA is of national importance for its Greylag Goose population, which is one of the largest in the country. The SPA provides the main roost for the birds, with feeding occurring mostly on improved grassland outside of the site.

Several waterbird species may at times use habitats situated within the immediate hinterland of the SPA or in areas ecologically connected to it [i.e., ex-situ sites]. The reliance on these habitats will vary from species to species and from site to site. Significant habitat changes or increased levels of disturbance within these areas could result in the displacement of the listed waterbird species from areas within the SPA, and/or a reduction in their numbers. A Conservation Objective target for the SPA is to have sufficient area of utilisable habitat available in ecologically important sites outside the SPA. It is not known whether zoning this land will lead to loss of such supporting habitat and thereby undermine the conservation objectives for the SPA. A number of other Annex I and Annex II species listed on the Birds Directive also utilise the SPA and surrounding suitable habitats for foraging, roosting, and breeding, including whooper swan, lapwing, snipe, wigeon, teal, mallard, to name a few. In addition, a reduction in water quality (either alone or in combination with other pressures on water quality) from construction activities could result in the degradation of sensitive habitats present within Poulaphouca Reservoir SPA, which in turn could negatively affect the SCI bird species that rely upon these habitats for foraging and/or roosting. It could also negatively affect the quantity and quality of prey available to SCI bird species. These potential impacts (in the absence of mitigation) could occur to such a degree that they result in significant effects which could have implications for the conservation objectives of The Poulaphouca Reservoir SPA.

The Department recommends that text is included for the zoning of PMA 25, to ensure all impacts as a result of any proposed works by itself and in combination with other plans or projects on the nearby SPA and any other European sites within the Zone of Influence of the site, are considered, and that all proposed projects must have regard to the Habitats Directive in this site.

The Department further recommends all hedgerows and treelines and other natural features are retained and light spill is avoided on these features within this site, to ensure ecological corridors between habitats to the south and north of SLO4 are maintained.

#### Proposed Material Amendments No. 5 - OP9

PMA No.5 includes the amendment from 'OS1' to 'TC Town Centre'. The Department welcomes the objectives for this site to retain hedgerows and treelines to the north/northwest, east, and southern boundaries. In order for these features to retain their suitability for foraging and commuting bats and other nocturnal species, lighting should also be limited in this site. There should be no additional light spill on the features where dark zones are existing currently, and any lighting proposed should have regard to best practice guidance, such as the Institute of Lighting Professionals Guidance on bats and artificial lighting.<sup>1</sup>

The Department further recommends text is included to ensure all impacts as a result of any proposed works by itself and in combination with other plans or projects on the nearby SPA and any other European sites within the Zone of Influence of the site, are considered, and that all proposed projects must have regard to the Habitats Directive in this site.

<sup>1</sup> Guidance Note 08/23: Bats and Artificial Lighting (BCT and Institute of Lighting Professionals 2023)

#### 7. Office of Public Works

The OPW, as lead agency for flood risk management in Ireland, notes the preparation of the material alterations to proposed variation no. 3 to the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028.

This submission is made specifically concerning flood risk management. Further submissions on the Issues Paper may be made by the OPW concerning the estate portfolio, heritage and other areas of responsibility.

OPW Commentary on the material alterations to the Blessington Local Area Plan will be made in a separate submission on the material alterations to the Draft Local Area Plan.

# 8. Office of the Planning Regulator

The Office notes the material alterations include several zoning changes proposed across the plan area, which the Office accepts as reasonable, if not positive.

In relation to proposed New Residential Priority 1 lands (MA 19, MA 22 and MA 24 to the draft Local Area Plan), while the Office recognises the addition of these lands significantly exceeds the housing land required to meet population and housing targets set out in the County Development Plan core strategy, the sites are well-located in terms of proximity to the town centre, supporting compact growth and the sequential approach. In addition, MA 19 is supported by a clear policy framework (SLO 2) in respect of phasing the development of the lands in conjunction with the delivery of community and physical infrastructure, providing the basis for a long-term vision for Blessington, as envisaged by the recently published Revised National Planning Framework (February 2025).

The Office recognises that the preparation of an LTP provides an opportunity for active travel linkages to / from and within SLO 2 (MA 19 to the draft Local Area Plan) to be considered given its proximity to the town centre, community facilities and amenities, and for active travel and sustainable transport measures to be key considerations for the future development of proposed Active Open Space zoned lands under MA 30 to the draft Local Area Plan. Once completed, to ensure integration of land use and transport planning, the LTP should be integrated into the Local Area Plan area in the County Development Plan via the variation process under section 13 of the Act. It is critical that this evidence-based assessment informs the plan and provides a clear rational for decision making. This is addressed in MA Recommendation 1 below.

# Integrated land use and transport planning

The Office welcomes the Planning Authority's commitment to prepare an LTP for Blessington, as proposed under MA 11 to the draft Local Area Plan, which will be prepared following adoption of the Local Area Plan and proposed Variation. To ensure integration of land use and transport planning, as per RPO 8.1 and 8.4 of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA), the key provisions of the LTP should be integrated into the Local Area Plan area in the County Development Plan via a variation under section 13 of the Act, and any adjustments should be made to the County Development Plan accordingly.

The Office recognises the preparation of an LTP provides an opportunity for active travel measures and linkages to be incorporated as part of the development of New Residential Priority 1 zoned lands proposed under MA 19 to the draft Local Area Plan within SLO 2, given the sites proximity to the town centre, community facilities and amenities, and as part of the future development of Active Open Space zoned land under MA 30 to the draft Local Area Plan given its peripheral location, supporting the development of a long-term vision for Blessington. The Office recommends additional text is included, as a minor modification, in MA 19 (SLO 2) and MA 30 to address this, in accordance with NPO 27 of the National Planning Framework (NPF).

#### MA Recommendation 1 – Integration of land use and sustainable transport

Having regard to the provision of a sustainable Transport Strategy and the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society including the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and in particular to:

 NPO 64 of the NPF to improve air quality through integrated land use and spatial planning that supports public transport and active travel modes;

- NPO 27 of the NPF to prioritise walking and cycling accessibility in the design of our communities;
- RPO 8.1 and RPO 8.4 of the RSES for the integration of land use and transport planning; and
- the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended, mandatory target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 51%, and the Climate Action Plan 2025, and associated actions including the National Sustainable Mobility Policy (2022) targets to reduce vehicle kilometres travelled per year and the National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland (2021),

the Planning Authority is recommended to make Variation No. 3 to the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028 with the following amendments:

- (i) incorporate the key provisions of the forthcoming Local Transport Plan for Blessington into the Blessington Local Area Plan 2025 area as a Variation under section 13 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (or any equivalent provision under the Planning and Development Act 2024);
- (ii) include new wording for the following zoning changes proposed under material alteration 2:
  - (a) MA 19 to provide pedestrian and cycle linkages through and between the New Residential Priority 1 lands and surrounding developments to improve permeability and provide shorter and more direct access to schools, public transport, local services and amenities; and
  - (b) MA 30 to provide pedestrian and cycle linkages between the Active Open Space zoned lands and surrounding developments to improve permeability and provide shorter, more direct routes to the site.

# **Opinion of Chief Executive**

**TII** – The CE notes the submission of TII.

**Department of Education** – The CE notes the submission of the Department of Education.

**OPW** – The CE notes the submission of the OPW.

**OPR & DHLGH** - These submissions all raise issues that have similarly been rasied in a submission by the same submitter to the Proposed Material Amendments to the draft LAP. Therefore the concerns / issues raised are addressed in detail in the CE's Report on the Proposed Material Amendments to the Draft LAP, as they all relate to zoning changes proposed for the LAP or do not relate to proposed alterations set out in Proposed Variation No.3. The zoning map adopted into the County Development Plan by way of this variation will be that map so approved by the Elected Members through the LAP making process.

This proposed alteration was recommended by the Chief Executive in her previous report and is still recommended.

#### **Recommendation of Chief Executive**

The CE's recommendation for each proposed zoning change is set out in the CE's Report to the Proposed Material Amendments to the LAP

To proceed to make Proposed Material Alteration No. 2 in accordance with the LAP zoning map adopted by the elected members.

#### **PROPOSED MATERIAL ALTERATION NO. 3**

Alter Map 4 Indicative Flood Zones Maps for the Blessington LAP

# **Proposed Material Alteration No. 3**

#### **Submissions**

#### 7. Office of Public Works

The OPW, as lead agency for flood risk management in Ireland, notes the preparation of the material alterations to proposed variation no. 3 to the Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028.

This submission is made specifically concerning flood risk management. Further submissions on the Issues Paper may be made by the OPW concerning the estate portfolio, heritage and other areas of responsibility.

OPW Commentary on the material alterations to the Blessington Local Area Plan will be made in a separate submission on the material alterations to the Draft Local Area Plan.

# **Opinion of Chief Executive**

**OPW** – The CE notes the submission of the OPW.

This proposed alteration was recommended by the Chief Executive in her previous report and is still recommended.

#### **Recommendation of Chief Executive**

To proceed to make Proposed Material Alteration No. 3

#### PROPOSED MATERIAL ALTERATION NO. 4

Alter Transport Strategy Maps for the Blessington LAP

# **Proposed Material Alteration No. 4**

#### **Submissions**

#### **Opinion of Chief Executive**

This proposed alteration was recommended by the Chief Executive in her previous report and is still recommended.

# **Recommendation of Chief Executive**

To proceed to make Proposed Material Alteration No. 4

# Strategic Environmental Assessment or Appropriate Assessment of the Proposed Material Alterations to Proposed Variation No. 3

# Strategic Environmental Assessment or Appropriate Assessment of the Proposed Material Alterations to Proposed Variation No. 3

# 1. Environmental Protection Agency

The EPA is one of the statutory environmental authorities under the SEA Regulations. In our role as an SEA environmental authority, we focus on promoting the full and transparent integration of the findings of the Environmental Assessment into plans and programmes1 and advocating that the key environmental challenges for Ireland are addressed as relevant and appropriate to the plan or programme. Our functions as an SEA environmental authority do not include approving or enforcing SEAs or plans or programmes.

As a priority, we focus our efforts on reviewing and commenting on key sector plans. For land use plans at county and local level, we provide a 'self-service approach' via our guidance document 'SEA of Local Authority Land Use Plans – EPA Recommendations and Resources'. This document is updated regularly and sets out our key recommendations for integrating environmental considerations into Local Authority land use plans. In finalising your SEA screening determination, we suggest that you take this guidance document into account and incorporate the relevant recommendations as relevant and appropriate to the plan or programme.

#### **SEA Determination**

If a proposed SEA determination hasn't been made regarding the plan or programme, you should determine whether implementing the plan or programme would be likely to have significant effects on the environment.

The SEA Regulations, Schedule 2A (S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended) or Schedule 1 (S.I. No. 435 of 2004, as amended), as appropriate, set out the 'Criteria for determining whether a Plan is likely to have significant effects on the environment' to use to determine whether the plan or programme would be likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Guidance on the SEA process, including an SEA pack and checklist, is available on our website at: <a href="https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/sessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/sea-resources-and-quidance-/">https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/sessment/sessment/sea-resources-and-quidance-/</a>

We recommend that you take the available guidance into account in making your SEA Screening Determination and incorporate the relevant recommendations as relevant and appropriate to the plan or programme.

#### **EPA SEA Screening Guidance**

Our *Good Practice Guidance for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening* (EPA, 2021) provides specific stand-alone guidance to assist plan or programme makers and SEA practitioners. It focuses primarily on plans/programmes in the non-land use sector in Ireland and includes an elaboration of the steps needed for screening, the legislative landscape underpinning SEA screening, and step-by-step process and templates to assist in preparing the required documentation.

# **Strategic Environmental Assessment: Guidelines for Planning Authorities**

The Strategic Environmental Assessment: Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities (DHLGH, 2022) provides advice on carrying out SEA in the land-use planning sector for those plans listed in S.I. No.436 of 2004, as amended. These plans comprise regional, county and local plans, including Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, County or City Development Plans, variations of

Development Plans, Local Area Plans and Planning Schemes for Strategic Development Zones. The Guidelines replace previous guidance for Regional Authorities and Planning Authorities published in 2004.

#### **Sustainable Development**

In proposing and in implementing the plan or programme, you should ensure that the plan or programme is consistent with the need for proper planning and sustainable development. Adequate and appropriate critical service infrastructure should be in place, or required to be put in place, to service any development proposed and authorised during the lifetime of the plan or programme.

In considering the plan or programme, you should take into account the need to align with national commitments on climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as incorporating any relevant recommendations in sectoral, regional and local climate adaptation plans.

You should also ensure that the plan or programme aligns with any key relevant higher-level plans and programmes and is consistent with the relevant objectives and policy commitments of the National Planning Framework and the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

The Plan should also align with the OPW's 'The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (OPW, 2009), as relevant and appropriate, in the zoning and development of lands.

#### **Ireland's State of the Environment Report 2024**

In October 2024, the EPA published the latest iteration of our 4-yearly State of the Environment Report. This report should be considered, and relevant aspects integrated as appropriate, in implementing the Plan outputs/ recommendations. It is available at: <a href="https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring-assessment/state-of-environment-report-/">https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring-assessment/state-of-environment-report-/</a>

#### **Available Guidance & Resources**

Our website contains various SEA resources and guidance, including:

- SEA process guidance and checklists;
- Inventory of spatial datasets relevant to SEA;
- Topic and sector specific SEA guidance (including SEA and Integration Guidance (EPA, 2025), Good practice note on Cumulative Effects Assessment (EPA, 2020), Developing and Assessing Alternatives in SEA (EPA, 2015), and Integrated Biodiversity Impact Assessment (EPA, 2012)).

You can access these guidance notes and other resources at: <a href="https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/sea-topic-and-sector-specific-guidance-/">https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/assessment/strategic-environmental-assessment/sea-topic-and-sector-specific-guidance-/</a>

#### **EPA SEA WebGIS Tool**

Our SEA WebGIS Tool has been updated recently and is now available at <a href="https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/SEA">https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/SEA</a>. It allows an indicative report on key aspects of the environment in a specific geographic area to be produced. It is intended to assist public authorities in SEA screening and scoping exercises.

#### Catchments.ie

Our <a href="https://www.catchments.ie/maps/">https://www.catchments.ie/maps/</a> website provides a single point of access to water quality and catchment data from the National WFD monitoring programme.

#### Future amendments to the plan or programme

Where changes to the plan or programme are made prior to finalisation, or where modifications to the

plan or programme are proposed following its adoption, these should be screened for potential for likely significant effects in accordance with the criteria set out in Schedule 2A (S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended) or Schedule 1 (S.I. No. 435 of 2004, as amended) of the SEA Regulations, as appropriate.

#### **Appropriate Assessment**

You should ensure that the plan or programme complies with the requirements of the Habitats Directive where relevant. Where an Appropriate Assessment is required, the key findings and recommendations should be incorporated into the SEA and the plan or programme.

#### **EPA AA GeoTool**

Our AA GeoTool application has been developed in partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service. It allows users to a select a location, specify a search area and gather available information for each European Site within the area. It is available at: https://gis.epa.ie/EPAMaps/AAGeoTool

#### **Environmental Authorities**

Under the SEA Regulations, prior to making your SEA determination you should consult with:

- Environmental Protection Agency;
- Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage,
- Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications; and,
- Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

For land use plans covered under S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended, you should also consult with:

any adjoining planning authority whose area is contiguous to the area of a planning authority which prepared a draft plan, proposed variation or local area plan.

#### **SEA Determination**

As soon as practicable after making your determination as to whether SEA is required or not, you should make a copy of your decision, including, if appropriate, the reasons for not requiring an environmental assessment, available for public inspection in your offices and on your website. You should also send a copy of your determination to the relevant environmental authorities consulted.

#### **Opinion of Chief Executive**

The CE is satisfied that all of the advice and guidance of the EPA has been taken into account in the SEA and AA processes followed for both the Proposed Variation and the Draft Local Area Plan (to which the Proposed variation relates).

# **Recommendation of Chief Executive**

To proceed to make Proposed Variation subject to any amendments / modifications that arises on foot of the LAP adoption process.

#### **3.0 MAPS**

List of maps to follow

Map 1A: Land use Zoning Map – published Draft LAP

**Map 1B:** Land use Zoning map – showing Proposed Material Amendments

Map 4A: Current Flood Risk

Map 4B: Current Flood Risk and Draft LAP

**Map 4C:** Current Flood Risk and Proposed Material Amendments

**Map 4D**: Future Flood Risk

Map 4E: Future Flood Risk and Draft LAP

**Map 4F**: Future Flood Risk and Proposed Material Amendments

**MAP 5A**: Proposed Amended Transport Strategy Map

**MAP 5B:** Proposed Amended Transport Strategy Map – Opportunity Sites

**MAP 6A:** Proposed Amended Active Travel Strategy Map

**MAP 6B:** Proposed Amended Active Travel Strategy Map – Opportunity Sites

